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(54) Supermarket stock control system

(57) A stock shelf availability system for use in supermarkets where stock is displayed for sale comprises a portable writing board (11) with two compartments (12, 13) for receiving complementary list and check cards (14, 15) side by side, the list cards having spaces for a list of stock details and the check cards having corresponding spaces upon which can be marked symbols denoting the shelf availability of the listed stocks.

The diagram illustrates a stock shelf availability system. It consists of two main compartments, 12 and 13, which are part of a portable writing board 11. Each compartment contains a list of stock details (14) and a corresponding list of check cards (15). The check cards have spaces for marking symbols denoting shelf availability (RED, AMBER, GREEN, WHITE). The diagram shows the layout of the compartments and the corresponding list and check cards.

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RED AMBER GREEN WHITE

At least one drawing originally filed was informal and the print reproduced here is taken from a later filed formal copy.

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12 11 14 13 11 15

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RED AMBER GREEN WHITE

SUPERMARKET SYSTEM

This invention relates to systems for use in supermarkets and like establishments where stock is displayed for sale.

Such establishments experience problems in maintaining shelves properly adequately stocked with goods for sale against varying customer take-up. Frequently, goods in stock, moreover, simply do not get put on shelves for sale and nobody notices for considerable periods of time during which, of course, the goods are not moving and represent dead investment to the establishment and loss of sales both to it and to the supplier, as well, no doubt, as frustration to shoppers who would buy the goods if they were displayed for sale.

Sophisticated computer based stock control systems are well known. There is, however, no simple system that can be used to check the actual contents of shelves on a routine basis that is capable of being operated by untrained staff.

The present invention provides such a system which can be used effectually on a routine basis to ensure that stock which is intended for sale is actually displayed for sale.

The invention comprises a stock shelf availability system for use in supermarkets and like establishments where stock is displayed for sale comprising a portable writing board with two compartments for receiving complementary list and check cards side by side, the list cards having spaces for a list of stock details and the check cards having corresponding spaces upon which can be marked symbols denoting the shelf availability of the listed stocks.

The check cards may have columns corresponding to empty, faced and full shelves. By "faced" is meant that a deep shelf is loaded only with a small quantity of stock and which therefore is in need of replenishment, perhaps less urgently than an empty shelf.

The compartment receiving the stock cards may be covered with a transparent window e.g. of clear plastic in order to protect the cards, which of course will be relatively long-lived items changing only as new stocks are added or deleted from the inventory. The compartment receiving the check cards, of course, will merely hold them around the edges, leaving the columns open for the symbols being entered in pencil, ink or other marker.

Stock cards will be prepared under the supervision of the supermarket manager according to the

items in the store inventory, and given to a staff member assigned the job of shelf checking. The staff member then tours the store marking off on the check card the shelf state of the products on the stock card. Boards may be prepared on an aisle or department basis so that the stock listed on the stock card of one board can be for example canned foodstuffs, normally expected to be displayed along one aisle, while on another board could be listed tea, coffee and other beverages.

Such an exercise would be conducted on a regular basis, as may be required according to the turnover in stock, but, say, once or twice a day at least, for most purposes.

The board, with its check card completed, is then used to control restocking the depleted shelves, an additional column being marked (e.g. initialled) when an empty or faced shelf is replenished. When the restocking is finished, the completed check card (also marked with date and time) is removed and filed for record purposes, and a clean check card inserted into the board.

An advantage of the system is that suppliers can ensure, through their sales representatives, that their products appear on the stock lists and hence are

adequately available on display. Another advantage is that filed check cards can be analysed to ascertain the frequency with which stock items have to be replenished, which may enable optimum shelf arrangements to be worked out.

One embodiment of a stock shelf availability system according to the invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawing, in which the single figure is a face-on view of a writing board, with specimen stock and check cards.

The board 11 is of durable construction comprising, for example, a hardboard core with a padded plastic finish. The board has two side by side pockets 12,13 of clear plastic material welded around the sides and bottom to the plastic board facing material and open at the top to receive the stock (14) and check (15) codes. Since the check card 15 will need to be written on, its compartment is open at the front. The stock card 14 is simply a printed card with provision for entering the names and sizes or other details of products viz "Fresh milk; litre", "Fresh milk; 1 litre", "UHT milk; litre" and so on.

The check card contains corresponding spaces and four columns, which may be differently coloured e.g. red

for "Empty", amber for "Faced" and green for "Full" - for obvious reasons. A fourth column is to record when an empty or faced shelf has been replenished.

The assigned staff member tours the appropriate shelf location and ticks off the appropriate columns against the shelf state of the listed stock and returns to the office when all the listed items have been checked for the store manager to supervise the appropriate replenishment action.

Whilst what is described above is clearly intended as a very basic, inexpensive to install and maintain and operation system, it will be realised that in establishments when there is already a more sophisticated stock control system, the present invention can nevertheless be used in conjunction therewith and adapted thereto as, for example, the stock cards being prepared by a computer and the check cards analysed by the same computer.

CLAIMS

1. A stock shelf availability system for use system for use in supermarkets and like establishments where stock is displayed for sale comprising a portable writing board with two compartments for receiving complementary list and check cards side by side, the list cards having spaces for a list of stock details and the check cards having corresponding spaces upon which can be marked symbols denoting the shelf availability of the listed stocks.
2. A system according to claim 1, in which the check cards have columns corresponding to empty, faced and full shelves.
3. A sytsem according to claim 1 or claim 2, in which the compartment receiving the stock cards is covered by a transparent window.
4. A stock shelf availability system substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.